

February 13, 2005

Freedom

Watch

Combined Joint Task Force - Afghanistan

***Engineers improve
Kandahar Airfield
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Spc. Jaime L. Toppe

Always learning

Romanian Capt. Lurescu Cristian explains to Spc. Debbie Helton, Combined Joint Task Force Phoenix, how to fire the SPG-9 73 mm recoilless anti-tank gun during a recent trip to a range in Afghanistan. Helton is part of the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration team that repairs foreign weapons for use by the Afghan National Army. The mission of CJTF Phoenix is to train and mentor the Afghan National Army.

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An engineer from Co. B, 204th Eng. Bn., guides wet cement into a wooden mold at Kandahar Airfield Jan. 26. The engineers were working on the Rotary Wing Expansion Project which will allow for more room during taxiing, refueling, takeoffs and landings on the airfield.

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Freedom Watch

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Marines, ETT Soldiers help kandaks develop

Story by Marine Cpl. Rich Mattingly
3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment

JALALABAD, Afghanistan — The Marines of 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, gained a new partner in Operation Enduring Freedom as the 23rd Kandak (battalion) of the Afghan National Army assumed authority in Jalalabad.

The kandak, whose soldiers recently graduated from Kabul Military Training Center, were welcomed to the fight by America's Battalion and U.S. Army Soldiers from the Embedded Training Team at a transfer of authority ceremony in eastern Jalalabad last month.

"The Afghan National Army plays a critical role in protecting and promoting the Afghan democracy," said Marine Lt. Col. Norm Cooling, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marines, commander.

"The Marines of America's Battalion will continue to work closely with Afghan forces to improve their training, as well as work side-by-side with the ANA to provide security for the Afghan people," he said.

The kandaks have always supported the Marine mission in Afghanistan with the help of the Army's Embedded Training Teams who liaison between the Marines and Afghan forces.

"We're a 14-man team who coach, mentor and train the leadership of a kandak," said Maj. Dave Vesper, 23rd Kandak, ETT deputy team chief.

"In a garrison environment, we direct formal classes, and during missions we act more as combat advisors, as well as go-betweens for the ANA and Coalition forces."

The 3/3 Kandak, which the 23rd



Sgt. Frank Magni

Army Maj. Dave Vesper, embedded trainer, leads a "train the trainer" session on proper searching and document procedures with a group of noncommissioned officers from 3rd Kandak, 3rd Brigade, Afghan National Army in Jalalabad. The 3rd Kandak was replaced last month by the 23rd Kandak. The embedded trainers had the chance to watch the 3rd Kandak develop under their mentorship and will be afforded that same opportunity with the 23rd Kandak.

replaced, was looked upon highly by the Marines who operated side-by-side with its personnel.

"The (3/3) kandak is an outstanding unit and it has been an honor to work with them," explained Marine 1st Lt. John-Paul Sienicki, Company L, 3rd Bn., 3rd Marines, platoon commander. "They have been vital in helping us develop a positive relationship with the Afghan people."

The 3/3 Kandak is a designated armor unit, but was deployed to Jalalabad as an infantry unit for the presidential election. As they return to Pol-e-Charki, near Kabul, they will undergo armor refresher training then return to being part of the quick reaction force for Afghanistan, ready to be deployed as an armor unit as needed.

Made up of a diverse mix of ethnicities and tribes from around the country, the kandaks are widely viewed by Afghans as a source of national pride. In this diverse environment where ethnic tensions still divide parts of the country, the kandaks are a unifying and stabilizing force for the Afghan people, said Vesper.

"The kandaks are the future

of Afghanistan," he said. "For many people, they are the most visible manifestation of the (national) government. Because of their multi-ethnic composition, they're seen as fair brokers of the peace."

Vesper related that when the ANA first began to operate around Afghanistan, they were not trusted by the Afghan Militia Forces, the remnants of the warlords' militias who had fought the Taliban regime.

"To the militia guys, the ANA were just another group of guys with AKs," explained Vesper. "Within two months, the ANA had the AMF turning in their weapons and explosives voluntarily. The ANA has built that trust."

Seeing the Soldiers and Marines working with the kandak further demonstrates to the people of Afghanistan that their mission is for the greater good of the country.

"People see their own government helping them, not just other nations, and that's very important to the development of Afghan self-government," said Vesper.

The transfer of authority ceremony was marked with speeches by Coalition and Afghan leaders, and a traditional Afghan dinner.

After the posting of the Afghan colors, many joined in the Afghan national dance to celebrate the successful transition between units.



Sgt. 1st Class Mack Davis

Marine Lt. Col. Norm Cooling, 3rd Bn., 3rd Marines, commander, greets an ANA soldier at the transfer of authority ceremony marking the transition between the 3rd Kandak, 3rd Bde., ANA, and the 23rd Kandak.



Sgt. Mark Mangune, Co. F, 2nd Bn., 25th Avn. Rgt., replaces an engine heat shield on a UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter. Damage to the heat shield was discovered during phase maintenance and the mechanics quickly made the repairs to keep the helicopter operational.

Avionics mechanics keep UH-60s flying

Story and photos by
Spc. Cheryl Ransford
17th Public Affairs Detachment

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan — Throughout the Global War on Terrorism, Soldiers often find themselves performing tasks that don't necessarily fit their job description.

But that's not stopping a team of about a dozen Soldiers from Company F, 2nd Battalion, 25th Aviation Regiment. Co. F is the only unit dedicated to conducting advanced maintenance on the UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters at Bagram Airfield.

"The Soldiers are responsible for performing phase maintenance on the aircraft," said Sgt. Nicholas Beauchamp, Co. F team leader.

When the Soldiers conduct phase maintenance on one of the helicopters, they start on the outside and work their way to the internal components, he said. By the time the maintenance is complete, 15 days later, the aircraft has been completely disassembled and reconstructed. Every piece of the aircraft has been looked at and repairs have been made.

"Along with performing scheduled phase maintenance on the aircraft, we also perform unscheduled maintenance tasks and take on unscheduled maintenance from the line units to lighten their work load."

While that seems like a lot of moving parts, Co. F makes it all come together like a well-oiled machine.

There are several different military occupational specialties within the company, but during the 10 months they have been in Afghanistan, they have learned how to accomplish the mission, no matter what the task.

"Because we never know what will happen with the aircraft, we have done a lot of cross training within the unit," said Staff Sgt. Jose Lopez-Olivera, Co. F squad leader. "The reason behind the cross training was so that if there is a lot of work in one shop but very little in another, those with a light work load that day can help out in the shops that are getting over-loaded, decreasing the work load, and getting the aircraft repaired and back in the air in a timely manner."

While aircraft breakdowns are an unexpected element of the work these Soldiers do, the phase maintenance is a fairly predictable part of their mission.

"Along with repairing the aircraft when they break down, we are also responsible

for conducting the phase maintenance on every aircraft once they have reached 500 hours," said Lopez-Olivera. "With so many missions going out, we have to make sure that only one aircraft is down for phase maintenance at a time, since it takes a few days to complete."

Keeping the aircraft mission capable is important, so the Soldier mechanics of Co. F never take shortcuts or make short-term repairs on the aircraft.

Since they never know when the aircraft will be needed for a mission, they have to ensure that the work they do is correct and done right the first time.

"The work we do is very important," said Lopez-Olivera. "I constantly stress to my Soldiers that this is not a job that you can second guess yourself. If they start second guessing their work, that's when accidents happen."

The work performed by the Soldiers of Co. F isn't always what they went to advanced individual training for, but it is always professional and precise, said Lopez-Olivera.

"Since most repairs that come through this unit require the aircraft to be taken apart so we can get to the internal workings, we have to be on top of our game," he said. "I would prefer to have quality over quantity. One mistake and a fire or accident could happen."

The aviation missions that are conducted throughout Afghanistan could not be completed without the work that is done by the Soldiers of Co. F.

"The level of readiness is a testament to the quality of work being done by these Soldiers," said Armstrong. "Without the work they do, the Task Force Pirate UH-60 fleet wouldn't be able to continue their highly necessary and regular missions."



Sgt. Patrick Delzer (top) and Spc. Matt Armstrong, both of Co. F, 2nd Bn., 25th Avn. Rgt., checks the deicing system on a UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter.

Logisticians wrap up OEF deployment

Support element ends year-long deployment serving OEF troops

Story by Sgt. Stephanie L. Carl

17th Public Affairs Detachment

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan — Logistics Task Force 725 was activated Jan. 3, 2004, with a mission of deploying the headquarters of the 25th Infantry Division (Light) and a brigade combat team from Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, to Afghanistan.

After a year of living up to its motto by providing “Service to the Line,” LTF 725 was deactivated Jan. 26, and the Soldiers of the 725th Main Support Battalion, part of the 25th ID (L) Division Support Command, cased their unit colors.

The unit redeployed to Hawaii, where they are preparing to reintegrate the rest of the division, which includes a BCT currently serving in Iraq, upon its return this spring.

“You served and soldiered for each other,” praised Col. Dave McKenna, Joint Logistics Command commander, during the redeployment ceremony. “Money and technology will never be able to replace what you all know and have – an affair of the heart.”

McKenna said the dedication and service to country many Soldiers have is a love that extends beyond boundaries, driving Soldiers to do their best to accomplish the mission.

One of these Soldiers McKenna spoke of was Pfc. Billy Scharf. The LTF 725 truck driver was awarded the Army Commendation Medal with Valor Device for his heroic actions when attacked by the enemy.

“I was just doing my job,” he said of his actions that earned



Sgt. Frank Magni

Sgt. Ronald Peters, LTF 725, works with an Afghan man to unload supplies from the back of a truck on Bagram Airfield. The task force, which redeployed last month, worked with many units and many individual people, such as the local population, during their year-long tour to ensure the personnel of OEF were well supplied and ready to accomplish any mission.

him the award.

The phrase “I was just doing my job” was said so often during the Soldiers’ year-long deployment it could have been adopted as the official unit motto, but its sincerity is what made LTF 725 successful throughout its deployment.

During their time in OEF, LTF 725 was responsible for

See **LTF 725**, Page 14

Enduring Voices

Who do you think was the most influential U.S. president and why?



Spc. David Schick

Co. B, TF 168

“George W. Bush, because he has had the most to deal with and has done the best he knows how.”



1st Lt. Robert Hanna

Co. A, TF-168

“Washington. He wasn’t afraid to get out there and spearhead the battle along side the Soldiers.”



Sgt. Frank Conetta

CJTF-76, CJ2

“Reagan, because he helped build the military.”



Marine Sgt. Patrick Salcido

HMH 462

“George W. Bush, because he takes care of business.”

Afghans deploy tsunami relief to Indonesia

Story and photo by Chuck Ricks
Military Professional Resources, Inc.

KABUL, Afghanistan — Some had never seen a lake filled with water, let alone the enormity of an ocean. Though experienced in treating battle injuries, certainly none had ever experienced the concentrated destruction awaiting them at the end of their journey.

Yet 20 Afghans volunteered to travel to unfamiliar terrain to make a difference in the midst of one of modern history's worst natural disasters.

In an event that one young observer called a turning point, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan deployed a medical and disaster response team to Indonesia and other sites of the December 2004 tsunami devastation.

Led by Afghan National Army Lt. Gen. Suhaila Siddiq, the former Minister of Public Health, the team flew from Kabul last month, dropped needed supplies in Sri Lanka and flew on to Indonesia.

Although the team was advised by members of the Office of Military Cooperation — Afghanistan, the operation was largely planned and executed by the team itself, which serves as a great credit to the training they have received from the Coalition.

Their mission was to provide materiel and professional assistance, and to learn as much as possible about disaster relief operations.

The team carried more than 30 tons of medical supplies, food parcels and native Afghan dried fruit and nuts.

"This is the first time Afghanistan has attempted a mission of this complexity," said Zaher Azimi, Afghan MoD spokesman.

"Usually, the world comes to us," he said. "This time, we are reaching out to the world to assist where we are able."

Ravaged by more than 25 years of violence, more than two million Afghans have died in recent wars, with many more injured. The disaster relief team brings considerable background and experience in dealing with mass casualties.

The mission, like few others, demonstrates the complexity of the OMC-A challenge — to balance the development of ANA capability, in this case medical, even as that capability is being deployed thousands of miles into the midst of a humanitarian disaster.

ANA Maj. Gen. Shahzada, Afghan MoD chief of disaster response, and Bob Brady, Military Professional Resources Inc., mentor for disaster response, presented the idea and preliminary plan for the relief mission to Minister of Defense Abdul Rahim Wardak. Once Afghan President Hamid Karzai approved the concept and expanded the scope of the mission, preparations began at a rapid pace.

OMC-A provided assistance as needed along the way.

However, "the Afghans took over the process early on, developed their own vision for the project, and were clearly in charge," Brady pointed out.

The synchronization of medical, disaster planning, airlift, logistics, news media coverage and coordination tasks with many dif-



ANA Lt. Gen. Suhaila Siddiq (left) and Zaher Azimi, Afghan MoD spokesman, address a large crowd at the sendoff for the ANA team that deployed to aid tsunami victims in Asia.

ferent governmental and non-governmental organizations required detailed preparation and response by the ANA.

"It's refreshing to see them take the initiative and run with it," said Dr. (Lt. Col.) Jose Betancourt, OMC-A Defense Health Sector Mentor. "Events like this should make all of us confident of the Afghan future."

It will be a future in which Afghanistan is an even bigger player on the international scene.

The team planned to remain for up to three weeks as they provide immediate assistance to the recovery effort, conduct assessments of what future help Afghanistan might be able to provide, and prepare a collection of lessons learned to improve the quality of disaster planning at home.

AAFES SERVICES HOURS OF OPERATION

Bagram Airfield

PX	Massage
0230-1630	0400-1800
Shoppette	Alterations
0230-1630	0430-1430
Burger King	Embroidery Shop
0430-1730	0430-1430
Food Court	Gift Shops
0600-1630	0430-1430
Coffee Shop	Sports Apparel
24 hours	0430-1430
Barber Shop	Black Ops Store
0430-1530	0430-1530
Day Spa	
0400-1600	

Kandahar Airfield

PX	Day Spa
0500-1700	0500-1700
Burger King	Alterations
0430-1730	0500-1700
Pizza Hut	Embroidery Shop
0600-1800	0500-1700
Subway	Gift Shops
0600-1430	0500-1700
Coffee Shop	Sports Apparel
24hrs	0500-1700
Main Barber Shop	Black Ops Store
0500-1700	0500-1700
Lagoon Barber Shop	Leather Shop
0300-1700	0500-1700

TF Phoenix

PX
0430-1630
Barber Shop
0330-1530
Alterations
0330-1630
Coffee Shop
24 hours

Kabul

PX
0430-1630
Barber Shop
0330-1530
Coffee Shop
24 hours

** All times in
Zulu/GMT*

Coalition docs mend boy's cleft palate

Story by Sgt. Stephanie L. Carl
17th Public Affairs Detachment

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan — Three-year-old Khan Mohammad clung to his uncle, Jan Mohammad, as he entered Bagram Airfield, overwhelmed by the unfamiliar people around him.

The two had just finished a six-hour drive from Ghazni province in central Afghanistan to the airfield, where Khan would undergo surgery.

Khan was born with a severe cleft palate. With his lip and gums split in the middle up to his nostrils and teeth protruding from the gums, it was difficult for the boy to eat and breathe.

Coalition doctors were hoping to change that.

"We first met Khan during a (cooperative medical assistance)," said Lt. Col. John Loose, a member of the Task Force Victory Surgeon Cell.

Noting Khan's discomfort and severe disfiguration, Loose contacted the 325th Combat Support Hospital at Bagram to see if they could help. In a matter of days, the surgery was scheduled.

The first part of the surgery was preparation.

Capt. Don Schondelmaier, a certified registered nurse anesthetist, administered a general anesthetic to help reduce his anxiety.

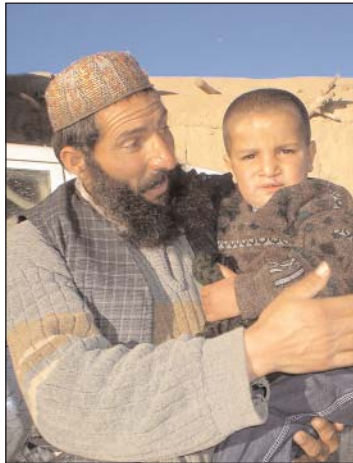
While Schondelmaier and his assistants inserted a breathing tube into the boy's throat, the surgeons, Drs. (Cols.) Dallas Homas and John Caufield, prepared for surgery. Soon, they were closely inspecting Khan's face, determining which parts of the lip would be cut and sutured, ensuring the folds of skin would match up to form the lip.

"This part here is the line between the inner and outer lip," said Caufield as Homas marked an incision point.

Working methodically, the two spent several hours in the operating room, ensuring Khan's lips would look as much like any other 3-year-old's.



Sgt. Stephanie L. Carl



Courtesy Photo

Above: Coalition doctors at the 325th CSH at Bagram Airfield operate on Khan Mohammad to repair his cleft palate. Before the surgery, Khan had trouble eating and breathing. Coalition members first met the 3-year-old boy through a CMA in Ghazni province and set up the surgery to help the young boy live a normal life. Left: Jan Mohammad holds his nephew Khan in Ghazni after the surgery.

For the attending surgeons and assistants, this surgery reflected their favorite part of working in Operation Enduring Freedom — helping others.

"To perform this surgery is very gratifying," said Caufield.

See *Surgery*, Page 15



PHOTOS FROM THE FIELD

Marine Staff Sgt. Rick Gould, Marine Detachment 4, 3rd Embedded Training Team, mans the turret of his up-armored high mobility multi-purpose wheeled vehicle as his team returns to their base following a firefight on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border in south-eastern Afghanistan. The Marines work directly with the Afghan National Army providing oversight on training in the developing Afghan National Army.

Photo courtesy of Marine Det. 4, 3rd ETT

If you have high-quality photos of service members supporting the Coalition mission or enjoying well-deserved off-duty time, please e-mail them to stumpc@baf.afgn.army.mil. Please include full identification and caption information, including who is in the photo and what action is taking place.

TF Saber builds positive relationship

Story and photos by Sgt. Frank Magni
17th Public Affairs Detachment

AZIZABAD, Afghanistan — Being a good neighbor is important to maintaining positive relationships with others living in close proximity to each other.

This is especially true for task forces throughout Operation Enduring Freedom.

With many bases just a few hundred meters from local residents, maintaining a positive relationship can benefit not only the Coalition, but their Afghan neighbors as well.

With this in mind, the Task Force Saber Civil Affairs Team, along with security elements from Troop A, 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment, and the Afghan National Army's 1st Company, 2nd Kandak, 2nd Brigade, traveled into Azizabad village last month to meet with local leaders.

Located just a few kilometers from Shindand Airfield in western Afghanistan, Coalition members frequently travel through the village.

"We were told the village had perceived negative sentiments toward the Coalition," said Sgt. Don Lockwood, Task Force Saber civil affairs team. "Azizabad village is right in the footprint of (Shindand Airfield), so we take this kind of information very seriously, as we would with any village."

The civil affairs team prepared for several humanitarian assistance events and the entire group went through hours of rehearsal, including the ever important aspect of force protection, before hitting the road.

"The safety of our group is the primary concern for everybody, but we have to be willing to see how the people react around us before we can get a true security assessment in the village," said Staff Sgt. Eric Johnson, Trp. A, 3rd Sqdn., 4th Cav. Rgt., squad leader.

With the force protection in place, Lockwood remained positive about the situation, despite the potentially negative mission they were conducting.

"It is all about mindset," he said. "Just because we have a perception there is a negative attitude, doesn't make it true."

The mission into Azizabad demonstrated this point.

When the team entered the village, the population initially stayed within their compounds — an action that is normally perceived as negative. But under the

watchful eye of the security team, the CA team pressed on and requested to meet with village leaders.

While waiting for the village leader to arrive at their central location within the village, many adults and children began approaching the team of civil affairs representatives.

Within half an hour, the CA team met with the village leader and the apparent shyness of the village developed into curiosity.

While meeting with local leaders, the civil affairs team learned the village was comprised of many different tribes of people. Their reluctance to meet with the team was not distrust toward the Coalition, rather simple trepidation toward strangers.

"We were going to assess when we got to the village whether it would be permissive for certain humanitarian assistance efforts," said Lockwood. "After our warm reception, we brought out everything we had."

In their four hours in the village, the CA team distributed a variety of items, including blankets, wood burning stoves and school supplies. The team also had a doctor treat some sick individuals within the village.



Sgt. Don Lockwood, TF Saber civil affairs, talks with an Afghan man from Azizabad village. Lockwood asked where he could meet with local leaders in an attempt to improve relations between the nearby village and Shindand Airfield.

The civil affairs Soldiers also evaluated the need for future projects such as wells and schools.

By the end of the visit, children played with willing Coalition members and hundreds of people stood in the streets to bid the team a warm farewell.

"It was a very positive experience for everybody involved," said Lockwood. "We were very happy to know another one of our neighbors support the Coalition."

The team plans to return to the village in the near future to follow up on the progress made and deliver more humanitarian assistance.



Spec. David Huntington, Trp. A, 3rd Sqdn., 4th Cav. Rgt., pulls security while a civil affairs team meets with local leaders in Azizabad village near Shindand Airfield.

GT IMPROVEMENT

Forward troops attend improvement classes

Story and photos by Sgt. Frank Magni
17th Public Affairs Detachment

SHINDAND AIRFIELD, Afghanistan — Soldiers assigned to Shindand Airfield, in southern Herat province, operate in one of the most remote locations for Coalition members in Afghanistan.

While their separation from a larger base is a golden opportunity to perform vital reconstruction and stability operations in the region, the Soldiers are separated from the niceties often offered at larger bases.

But educational opportunities are one advantage those in Shindand don't have to miss as a result of their seclusion.

Despite long days and limited resources, Soldiers have the opportunity to improve their score on a portion of the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery by attending the General Technical improvement course.

The classes, taught by Troop D, 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Sgt. Dale Jeansonne, are held late in the evening to accommodate Soldiers who work both day and night shifts.

The initial response to the class has been overwhelming, said Jeansonne.

More than 50 Soldiers from the units assigned here have signed up for the GT improvement class, forcing Jeansonne to run two classes throughout the week.



First Sgt. Dale Jeansonne, Trp. D, 3rd Sqdn., 4th Cav. Rgt., answers a student's question during a General Technical class at Shindand Airfield.



Spec. Joseph Castonuova, Trp. D, 3rd Sqdn., 4th Cav. Rgt., takes a practice test during a General Technical improvement class on Shindand Airfield.

"It is kind of an overwhelming response," said Jeansonne. "But it shows me how important programs like these are for the Soldiers."

These classes provide many positive results for the individuals, the unit and, ultimately, the Army.

With an improved GT score, many Soldiers can pursue a variety of different military opportunities. Along with warrant officer and officer candidate schools, a higher GT score can also help with reclassifying into a desired military occupational specialty.

However, most of the Soldiers who participate in the course are using it as a stepping stone to get themselves involved in higher learning, said Jeansonne.

Spec. Joseph Castonuova, Trp. D aviation mechanic, is one of those Soldiers.

Years away from reenlistment and still unsure of any future career decisions, Castonuova said the class is simply a way to better himself.

"I like ways to challenge myself," he said. "It is a refresher course for me and gets me in the mindset to take other classes."

Ultimately, Castonuova said he sees the class as a good way to spend his free time.

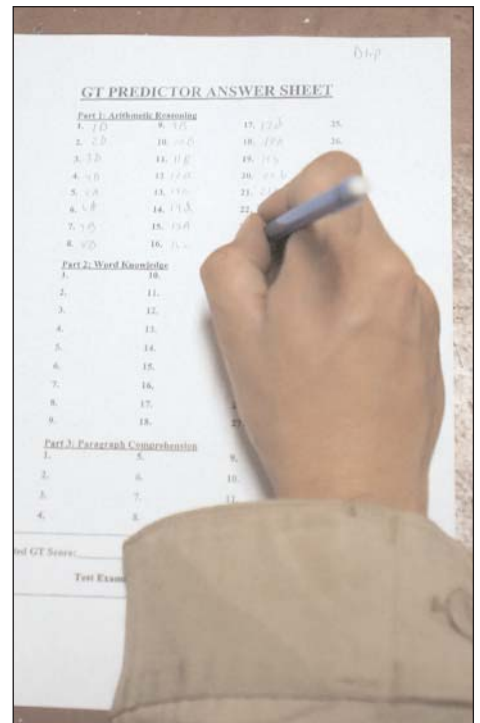
"Even though we don't get a lot of free time, I would rather do this than watch TV or play video games," he said.

Getting Soldiers in a learning environment, no matter what kind, is important, said Jeansonne. The added bonus of promotion points doesn't hurt either.

"Education is very important for many Soldiers," he said. "I think this sends an

important message to the Soldier — we care about their improvement."

While GT improvement is the focus, in the future, Jeansonne plans on offering other military development classes that can be used for college credit and the College Level Examination Program.



Spec. Timothy Ortiz, Trp. D, 3rd Sqdn., 4th Cav. Rgt., writes down an answer on a practice test administered during a General Technical improvement class.



204th Engineers help expand Kandahar Airfield

Story and photos by Spc. Dijon Rolle
17th Public Affairs Detachment

KANDAHAR AIRFIELD, Afghanistan — Soldiers from Company B, 204th Engineer Battalion, are putting the final touches on Kandahar Airfield's Rotary Wing Expansion Project.

Since last spring, the New York-based National Guard unit attached to Louisiana's 528th Eng. Bn. has poured and shaped yards of concrete by hand to help expand the existing airfield here.

Soldiers like Spc. Mitchell Vance, Co. B carpentry and masonry specialist, need few words to sum up their experience working on the nearly year-long project.

"A lot of hard work," said Vance. "Summer, winter, rain, we were out here working, trying to get it all done. We weren't even supposed to finish this project, but we did it. ... We met a lot of challenges."

Some of those challenges included changes in the project's design, harsh weather conditions and loss of funding which forced the Soldiers to shut down

their operations twice.

"This has been a long project, but the Soldiers remain motivated," said Sgt. 1st Class Timothy Paluch, Co. B general construction platoon leader. "The progress we've made is amazing, and it makes us feel good that we've been able to accomplish so much during our time here. We'll take that with us."

For others, the motivation to complete the project was simple.

"I just wanted to meet expectations," said Spc. Daniel Cruz, Co. B carpentry and masonry specialist. "I'm probably the smallest guy out here, so I wanted to keep up with everyone else and work hard. I wanted to pull my weight."

Cruz is indeed pulling his weight and then some as he spent the majority of his time working in knee-deep concrete, spreading the heavy mixture into wooden molds.

A local concrete company pre-mixes and delivers the truckloads of concrete the engineers use daily. The Soldiers pour and shape the gooey mixture of sand, water and stone into 10-by-200-foot wooden molds, creating the large concrete slabs that

make up the flight line.

The thick slabs take about a day to dry and two weeks to cure. So far, the engineers have laid the equivalent of nearly 340 football fields worth of concrete.

While the battalion itself has Soldiers working on various construction projects throughout the country, several engineers remained here, dedicating their skills to the ongoing airfield expansion.

Once the project is finished, the airfield will have a new refueling pad, three new taxiways and more space for aircraft to park and refuel — all this on the concrete the engineers laid.

These additions will help to ease congestion on the flight line and support the base's gradual movement.

"Coming out here day after day, sometimes sun up to sun down, we've put a lot into this ... all of us, and we're proud of it," said Cruz.

"We're making it better for all the units coming after us," he said. "It'll be easier for them to get materials in and out of here using the airfield. We're upgrading the base."



Above: Engineers from the 204th Eng. Bn., New York National Guard, work together to smooth and shape wet cement into a mold on the Kandahar Airfield flightline Jan. 26th.

Left: Spc. Daniel Cruz, Co. B, 204th Eng. Bn., New York National Guard, wades through knee-deep wet cement as he uses a rake to push the thick mixture into a wooden mold at Kandahar Airfield.

Top: A Soldier from Co. B, 528th Eng. Bn., loads scraps into a frontloader while putting the final touches on the airfield.

ENDURING IMAGES

Combat Camera's lenses capture activities of Coalition around CJOA



Photos by Spc. Harold Fields

Above: A Soldier from the Asadabad PRT scans his sector at a vehicle checkpoint in Manoi Jan. 14. The checkpoint was set up to catch anti-Coalition militants sought by the Coalition, as well as search for illegal weapons.

Right: A Marine from the Asadabad PRT keeps an eye out for suspicious activity during a mission to Nuristan Jan. 10.



Soldiers from the Asadabad PRT provide security at a vehicle checkpoint in Manoi Jan. 14.



Above: A Marine from the Asadabad PRT moves into position in Nuristan during stability and security operations Jan. 10.

Left: Soldiers and Marines from the Asadabad PRT move out after being airlifted onto a mountain in Nuristan. Helicopter insertion allows them to quickly gain access to an area while maintaining the element of surprise against potential enemies.

Kaboom! Air Force EOD team destroys half a ton of explosive ordnance

Story and photos by
Air Force Capt. Catie Hague
455th Air Expeditionary Wing

EAST RIVER RANGE, Afghanistan — Heat, shock and friction were key ingredients in the controlled detonation of more than 1,000 pounds of explosives Jan. 23.

The 455th Expeditionary Civil Engineer Squadron explosive ordnance disposal team spent close to six hours, three miles outside Bagram Airfield's gate, preparing for a less than one-second blast.

"Most of what we destroyed was old ammo — explosives that people found throughout Afghanistan or those collected by the Office of Special Investigations," said Air Force Senior Airman Kristie Timberlake, 455th ECES EOD technician. "There's a safe-holding location on Bagram where all kinds of munitions are stored. Once we collect enough, the team travels out to the range and blows 'em up."

The unexploded ordnance destroyed included everything from small arms and aircraft ammunition and rockets, to howitzer casings, large projectiles, grenades and anti-tank mines.

"The most important thing to consider in any disposal operation, next to safety, is the continuity of the explosives," said Air



Over 1,000 pounds of ordnance light up the sky Jan. 23 at East River Range.

Force Staff Sgt. Robert Whitehurst, 455th ECES EOD team chief. "You want each block of demolition explosive (C-4) to be touching another block, so when the wave comes off the first initiation point, it successively initiates the next."

There is a method to layering these explosives, so as not to produce "kick-outs, frag or failure of initiation," said Whitehurst. "Experience has taught us

how to efficiently and effectively get the job done in the least amount of time, while destroying the most amount of munitions and using a minimum amount of demolition explosives."

In this case, the most powerful, or earth-moving, explosives were placed on top, while the next layer contained what is known as "bras ant" explosives, explained Whitehurst.

"These cut, separate and destroy every other explosive underneath — the exact reason why we placed the UXOs, mostly scrap metal, on the bottom."

In the end, sensitized detonating cord was used to initiate the blast.

The overall mission of EOD is to protect personnel and property against all explosively driven threats — anything that could present a hazard to the local populace.

"At Bagram Airfield, the local populace includes all the Coalition forces deployed here, regardless of the unit they come from or who they work for," said Whitehurst.

Afghanistan has the second largest cache of foreign weapons in the world, next to Iraq, he said. "Our technicians are brought in to destroy them and deal with threats such as suspect packages and improvised explosive devices — letter bombs, roadside bombs, et cetera — all force protection issues that put our military personnel in danger."

Simply, the EOD mission comes down to "initial success or total failure."



Above: The unexploded ordnance destroyed by the 455th ECES explosive ordnance disposal team included small arms, howitzer casings, large projectiles and anti-tank mines.

Left: Air Force Staff Sgt. Zach Ross, 455th ECES explosive ordnance disposal technician, prepares demolition explosives for the destruction of more than 1,000 pounds of unexploded ordnance collected by EOD.

NCOs enforce weapons safety standards

Safeguarding the Coalition

Compiled by Spc. Cheryl Ransford
17th Public Affairs Detachment

AFGHANISTAN — George Santayana once wrote, "Those who cannot remember the past, are condemned to repeat it." This is especially true for service members placed in leadership positions throughout the U.S. military.

Leaders are tasked with, among many other things, ensuring the safety of those in their charge. A good leader takes from his experiences, good or bad, and shares them with his fellow service members.

The *Freedom Watch* staff solicited the following vignettes from noncommissioned officers operating throughout Afghanistan, asking them to share their experiences and lessons learned while serving as part of Operation Enduring Freedom.

This month's vignettes focus on weapons safety and ensuring service members are protected from negligent discharge and friendly fire.

Marine Gunnery Sgt. James Hagle OMC-A Operations chief

“Maintaining weapons safety prevents service members from injuring themselves and those around them.



One main part of weapons safety is muzzle awareness. Making sure service members maintain muzzle awareness will limit the number of incidents.

During my time in the Marines, I have learned that there are too many dangers that we face on a day-to-day basis for us to be getting injured in the process of performing our daily duties.

Preventing such injuries is something all service members are responsible for.

We have to observe each other and trust the NCOs to enforce weapons safety and the importance of why everyone should follow the standards.”

Command Sgt. Maj. Stephen Barrett 5th Kandak ETT

“Weapons safety helps protect the lives of Soldiers and prevents them from going home different from how they arrived.



NCOs in each unit need to ensure their people are properly clearing and handling their weapons.

If someone sees weapons that are not cleared or not on safe, the appropriate steps should be taken immediately to ensure they know the right way to clear and handle their weapon.”

Air Force Senior Master Sgt. Bill Decker CFC-A, Resource Management

“Maintaining weapons safety prevents service members from shooting their neighbor.



If you or someone around you gets injured or killed, the entire unit is that much less mission capable.

One way NCOs can ensure people are doing the right thing with their weapons is to watch the people around them.

Whether you are standing in line or inspecting your own unit, everyone should look around and make sure all weapons are on safe.

For every service member injured or killed by friendly fire, it's one less person out there helping complete the mission and fight against the enemy.”

Master Sgt. Thomas Krynicki 1st Bn., 1st Bde., ANA ETT NCO mentor

“If weapons aren't treated with respect, that is when accidents happen. Every weapon should be cleared properly when on base. To ensure this is being done, NCO's

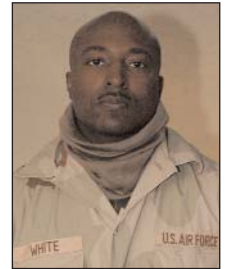


should be supervising their Soldiers and making sure they are doing the right thing. Within each unit there should be buddy teams set up to check each other so that accidents don't happen.

During my time in the Army, I have seen people lose their eyesight due to negligence. A weapon is an instrument designed to kill. It should be treated as such at all times.”

Air Force Master Sgt. Terrence White FOB Salerno contracting office

“Weapons safety prevents service members from damaging government property and injuring others. Weapons should only be used for their intended use. Otherwise, accidents can happen.



To ensure accidents are reduced, NCOs should spot check their people occasionally and trust the other NCOs to also do the same.

Maintaining safety standards can save lives.

All weapons should be treated as if they are loaded at all times. Doing so will limit the number of incidents that can and do happen.”

Sgt. Travis Kline 368th MI Bn Supply sergeant

“Weapons safety cuts down on the number of negligent discharges and friendly fire situations that service members may have to encounter.



One of the best ways to maintain safety is to educate the Soldiers. Safety should be reinforced in everything we do.

From walking around on base to going out on convoys, Soldiers need to know and do the right thing at all times.

While many things in life don't go exactly as planned, weapons safety shouldn't be one of the things we have to worry about. Everyone out here is a trained professional and should be able to act like one with their weapon at all times.

LTF 725: Logistics task force completes 1-year mission

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ensuring more than 21 million gallons of fuel were delivered throughout the combined/joint operations area. The Soldiers also completed more than 4,600 maintenance jobs and issued 4.8 million meals to Coalition forces in Afghanistan.

To accomplish the feat of supplying the Coalition, LTF 725 relied on dedicated Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines, and even the local population, to get supplies to the people who needed them.

While LTF 725 soldiered as hard as any unit in Afghanistan, most of the unit's personnel performed behind the scenes, out of sight, but everyone knew what they were doing was just as important as any mission in the spotlight.

"LTF 725 has all the people you never see, but you know are there when you need something," said Capt. Soraya Esmaili, LTF 725 personnel officer.

"It may not be the most glamorous of jobs, getting the most attention, but it's one of the most important ones here," she said of the unit's mission of controlling virtually all the supplies that come

into theater via Bagram Airfield and pushing them out to the men and women in the field.

From small arms repair to aircraft fuel and food brought in on "jingle" trucks, LTF 725 was there to ensure the Coalition was fit to fight.

Keeping personnel battle-ready started before most of the personnel LTF 725 supported even put their boots on Afghan soil.

"When everyone else from the 25th got here last year, LTF 725 was already here, up and running, and confident," said Maj. Gen. Eric T. Olson, Combined Joint Task Force-76 commander. "The thing that impressed me the most was the confidence on their faces when we arrived.

"You got us started in a great fashion, and you've kept us going," he said.

In recognition of their hard work, Scharf and his fellow LTF 725 Soldiers received awards ranging from an Army Certificate of Achievement to the Bronze Star Medal.

"Together, your commitment, courage and selflessness have shown that one person's effort really makes a difference," said McKenna. "You've made the phrase 'One Team' a reality."



Sgt. Frank Magni

Sgt. Samuel Ogungbemi, Logistics Task Force 725, moves a container filled with supplies being delivered to Bagram Airfield from the back of a truck. The task force was responsible for providing a steady flow of supplies to keep OEF personnel fed, armed and equipped.

Dari/Pashto phrase of the week



Dari
Congratulations
Tabriq (Tah-breeck)

Pashto
Congratulations
Mu baraksha (moo bah-rock-shaw)

Afghan cultural tidbit

The birth of a first child is the occasion for a day-long celebration, which is more elaborate if the child is a boy. Subsequent births receive less attention. The sixth night after a birth there is an open house celebration for friends, who bring small gifts.

Commentary: Broken barriers evident during Eid

As the Muslim world conducted its annual Hajj and celebrated Eid Al-Adha (Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son for God) this year, Soldiers from Company B, 2nd Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment, along with Soldiers from the Sharana Provincial Reconstruction Team contributed to their festivities.

The Soldiers donated 160 winter jackets, 170 blankets, 30 sheep and a hot meal in the Sharana government compound Jan. 19.

As I sat and enjoyed this meal with the Afghans, I reflected on how the Soldiers have grown and matured along with Paktika province.

Our task force has done so much since arriving in March 2004.

Many Soldiers have realized that to win the hearts and minds of the population, you must first understand their religion and be compassionate to their needs. It is not the normal duty of an

infantryman, artilleryman or air defender to hand out humanitarian assistance, but the Soldiers of this task force have adapted well to the many facets of these duties outside their military occupational specialty.

The festivities did not end in Sharana

"You know people are needy when they stand in the snow up to their ankles with no shoes or jackets waiting for a hand out."

that day. Feeling like old Saint Nicholas during Christmas, we used our up-armored vehicles as sleighs to continue handing out jackets, school supplies, candy and blankets in the villages of Satore and Orgun-E.

You know people are needy when they stand in the snow up to their ankles with no shoes or jackets waiting for a

hand out, especially the little girls I encountered in Satore.

They cried while holding their feet since they were not protected from the ice and snow.

This country needs our help and I am proud to know that the Soldiers in the Wolfhounds' area of operations have made a difference.

We can win this war by providing assistance through projects, schools or even playing a friendly game of soccer or volleyball.

Our actions in the past year have broken down some of the barriers and misconceptions that Americans are anti-Muslim. Everyone needs to reflect on their contributions over the past year. I am not a Muslim, but I enjoyed this Eid celebration with my friends in Afghanistan.

Sgt. Maj. Anthony Marrero
2nd Bn., 27th Infantry Rgt.

Surgery: 3-year-old's deformity mended by Coalition

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"It's not every day that we are able to perform a relatively straightforward procedure that will enable a child to live a normal life."

The surgeons often find themselves operating on trau-

ma patients – individuals who otherwise wouldn't survive without immediate surgery. So this operation was a welcome change that not only tested their skills, but will provide a lasting impact on the local community.

Caufield, a Vietnam veteran,

has seen the other benefits to such surgeries.

"I performed many operations like this while I was in Vietnam," said the surgeon. "The effect that it has in the communities is great as well. When this boy returns to his village, everyone will see the

change and know the Americans helped him, which will cultivate more support for the Coalition."

The surgeons deemed the surgery a success and Khan returned to his village to begin a new chapter of what should be a healthy life.

Letters to the Editor

The *Freedom Watch* would like to publish your opinions on topics of importance and interest to those serving in OEF.

Please send your thoughts in letter form to the editor. All letters e-mailed must include full name, unit, address and, when possible, telephone number. We will not print anonymous letters. Please limit all letters to 200 words or less.

We reserve the right to edit letters for length, clarity and decorum.

Please avoid implying criticism of U.S. or DoD policies and programs, advocating or disputing specific political, diplomatic or legislative matters, or implying criticism of host nation or host nation sensitivities.

Please send your letters to: stumpc@baf.afgn.army.mil

We look forward to hearing from you!

OEF "Values" Essay Contest

Personnel in Afghanistan are invited to participate in the Operation Enduring Freedom bi-monthly "Values" Essay Contest sponsored by CJTF-76.

The current value is **"Duty."**

Rules

- ☐ Essays should include the definition of the featured value and your own experience(s) that reinforce this value
- ☐ Essays will be at least one and no more than two pages (typed/neatly printed and double-spaced)
- ☐ Please include a cover page with Title, Author's Name, Supervisor's Name, Unit/Organization, Phone Number and e-mail address if available
- ☐ Do not put name directly on essay
- ☐ Submit essays to EO Adviser nearest your location, via e-mail or hard copy by **Feb. 25.**

The winning essay writer will receive a CJTF-76 Commanding General's Certificate of Achievement and other prizes to be announced. The essay will also be published in a future issue of the *Freedom Watch*, and in the bi-monthly EO Update.

EO is also looking for E-7s and above to help review essay submissions and select the winning essay.

Call the Bagram EO Senior Adviser at DSN 318-231-3021 for more information.

Freedom Watch

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Tending the herd

Lt. Col. Mark Martinez (left), Task Force Victory veterinarian, deworms a goat in Farah province. Photo by Air Force 1st Lt. J. Elaine Humnicutt